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NOTES ON THE USE OF THE HEBREW TENSES.

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II.

HEBREW AND ENGLISH.

Our great debt to German Hebrew scholars is not without its disadvantages. Its necessary indirectness is a misfortune. Our English hand-books, even when not translations or editions of German works, have something of the character of an adaptation, for the use of English students, of an exposition of the theory of Hebrew Syntax prepared for German students, and such an adaptation, however scientifically correct, is apt to lack force and clearness.

German, too, is not the most desirable medium through which to study Hebrew. It is massive, and perhaps somewhat rigid, whereas Hebrew is elastic. For instance, German rejoices in polysyllabic compounds, and Hebrew, except in proper names, has no compounds at all; nor is there anything in the use of the Hebrew verb parallel to the German custom of accumulating auxiliaries at the end of a sentence.

Perhaps, however, the disadvantages of studying Hebrew through German are rather negative than positive. It is not so much that we are misled by Germanisms as that we lose the analogies furnished by our own language, and authorities are not careful to express themselves according to the terms of modern English grammar. They seem to think that modern Hebrew Syntax may be expressed by English Syntax of the times when English was chiefly looked upon as a vehicle for translations of Greek and Latin, and its tenses named after the Greek and Latin tenses they most frequently translated.

Driver, indeed, furnishes us with a beginning of better things; but even here there seems room for improvement under this head.

For instance, he emphasizes (p. 2) the distinction between *order* and *kind* of time, and states (p. 4) that as regards *kind* of time we are by no means sensitive. Now Dr. R. Morris, in his *English Grammar* (p. 54), having given as the three tenses Past, Present and Future, adds that each tense has four forms, according to the state of the action, viz., Indefinite, Progressive or Imperfect, Completed or Perfect, Perfect and Progressive. This state of the action corresponds to Driver's kind of time. Is it fair to say of a language that expresses kind of time so fully that it is by no means sensitive as regards this quality. True, authors who constructed English Syntax on the basis of Latin grammar, may have lacked sensitiveness in this particular; but then Hebrew grammars are still in use which speak chiefly of the Past and Future.

It follows from this ignoring of the terms of modern English Syntax that the terms "present," "perfect," "imperfect," etc., are used without any closer definition, and vagueness and ambiguity are introduced, where clearness would have been gained by using the double terms which express both order and kind of time, e. g., Present Perfect.

We may first notice that in English in its present form, as in Hebrew, we have only two tense forms obtained by inflection, the Present Indefinite and Past Indefinite. Moreover, the Subjunctive form is now, except in the first and second person singular, identical with the form of the Present Indefinite, just as in Hebrew the same form is used for the Imperfect and for the Jussive. Hence, as Driver (p. 74) points out, there is an ambiguity in English between the Indicative and Subjunctive which serves to illustrate that in Hebrew between the Imperfect and the Jussive. This same coincidence of form between the Indicative and Subjunctive illustrates Driver's contention (pp. 95, 96) that the coincidence of form in the Jussive and the Imperfect with Waw Cons. is accidental. We see that in English the Indicative Present Plural "berath" and the Present Subjunctive "beren" give us in modern English one form, "bear," for both Indicative and Subjunctive (Morris' Historical Outlines of English Accidence, pp. 173, 174), just as, according to Driver, in Hebrew the Imperfect after Waw Cons. and the Jussive arrive at the same form through independent processes of development and not through connection in sense.

We pass on to the

USES OF THE PERFECT.

In a previous note we implied that the English Perfect might approximately be held to include the uses of the Hebrew Perfect, as regards the Past, Perfect and Pluperfect, the Hebrew Perfect of affirmation and the Hebrew Perfect used as a Present.

Now Davidson's general table of the uses of the Perfect (p. 51) is as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. The Aorist (Past) | <i>he killed</i> |
| b. The Perfect | <i>he has killed</i> |
| c. The Pluperfect | <i>he had killed</i> |
| d. The Future Perfect | <i>he shall have killed</i> |

Here we may notice that Davidson does not feel it necessary to include in his general sketch the uses of the Perfect as a Present or Future Indefinite.

Again the forms in b, c, d are the three tenses of the English Perfect, thus,

<i>he has killed</i>	Present Perfect
<i>he had killed</i>	Past Perfect
<i>he shall have killed</i>	Future Perfect

Hence it appears that in English this *kind* or *state* of time is fully recognized, and that English grammars include under the English Perfect just those forms which are given in Hebrew grammars as the English equivalents of the Hebrew

Perfect. Herein at least English grammar seems fully sensitive to kind of time. Also under this head we may notice another point. The student as he reads such a sketch as Davidson's is struck with the fact that one Hebrew form may have so many English equivalents, and mentally notes it as a characteristic difficulty of the Hebrew language. The tone of most hand-books on the subject tends to foster this feeling, and doubtless the feeling is largely true. But similar characteristics exist in English, and the difficulty is one of degree rather than of kind.

For instance, in English the form of the Present Perfect, *he has killed*, is used as Aorist, Perfect and Future Perfect.

The best illustration of the use of the Present Perfect for an Aorist or Indefinite Past is perhaps given by those cases in which English idiom compels us to translate a Greek Aorist by a Present Perfect. For instance, in Luke xiv. 18 ἀγρὸν ἡγόρασα, etc., the sense is plainly that of an Aorist, and yet it is scarcely possible to translate in English "I bought a field and therefore I cannot come;" we say rather "I have bought, etc." (Moulton's Translation of Winer, p. 345.)

The use as Perfect or Present Perfect is, of course, the ordinary way.

The Present Perfect form is commonly used for the Future Perfect in such sentences as: "If he has finished his work when you see him, ask him to come here;" which is equivalent to "If he shall have finished, etc."

Even the rarer uses of the Hebrew Perfect have some parallels in those of the English Present Perfect. Take, for instance, Davidson's example of the Perfect of Experience, Ps. lxxxiv. 4, "The swallow finds מְצֵאָה a home," the English Version "hath found" equally expresses a general truth of experience, just as "Nature has provided birds with wings" is as good English as "Nature provides birds with wings."

In the case of stative verbs and verbs like יָדַע it might perhaps be as accurate to say that English uses a Present Indefinite for a Present Perfect, as to say that Hebrew uses the Present Perfect as Indefinite. "I know" = "I have learnt;" "I am old" = "I have become old," and so with many other such words.

Again, in the case of the Prophetic Perfect and Perfect of Strong Affirmation, it is not that a Past tense or Perfect form is used for a Future tense or Imperfect form; but the speaker, as in the case of Ephron the Hittite, wishes to represent the Future or Imperfect as Past or Perfect, and so uses the Past or Perfect, intending it to carry its own meaning. The English student feels the propriety of the Perfect, and feels an English Present Perfect, though not idiomatic, would be perfectly intelligible, and that "I have given" for נָתַתִּי would be a fair equivalent for the English expression used in such cases "It is yours already."

We obtain similar results from examining

THE USES OF THE IMPERFECTS.

Davidson's sketch (p. 54) is as follows:

- a. The Present, *he kills* (especially of general truths).
- b. The Imperfect, *he killed* (particularly of repeated past acts).
- c. The Future, *he will kill*.
- d. The Potential, *he may or can, might, could, would, etc., kill*.

It is true that the usages thus given as belonging to the Imperfect "kind of time" do not cover the same area as those of any one English "state of the action;" but curiously enough they have most in common with some of the usages of the forms of the English Indefinite.

Thus the English forms under *a*, *b*, and *c*, are those of the English Present, Past and Future Indefinite respectively. The English Present Indefinite is commonly used of general truths, and we find the Past Indefinite for repeated actions thus: "He got up at six every morning."

Here again many of the meanings included in this group may be expressed by one English form, either the Present Indefinite or the Future Indefinite.

The Present Indefinite is used of course of the present, very commonly of general truths; it is used of past actions whether single or frequentative, as the Historical Present; it is also used of the Future in such sentences as: "Next year my brother comes home." It has already been pointed out that a form sometimes similar to, sometimes identical with the Indicative Present Indefinite is used as a Subjunctive, which would cover some of the uses of *d*. This last resemblance is, however, accidental.

But on the other hand, the Future Indefinite is also used of general truths, and even of a single fact, as: "This will be your brother." It is true that in the latter case, as more or less in other cases of the Future, the usage is more or less due to the influence of the meaning of "will" as an auxiliary; but this does not alter the fact that the same *form* is used for these different senses. Again, of course, the Future Indefinite is used of the Future; and is in some cases equivalent to some of the Potential uses of the Hebrew Imperfect. It is even used of the Past where the main tense of a narrative is the Historical Present. Thus, in Byron's *Siege of Corinth*, stanza xxvi., the tenses are chiefly Historical Presents, but we have two lines:

"There is not a banner in Moslem war
Will lure the Delhis half so far."

It is true that this usage may be due to the writer placing himself at the point of view of the actors in his narrative; but then a similar explanation might plausibly account for many Hebrew Imperfects.

The use of the Hebrew Imperfect for repeated action in the past finds its parallel in English in the use of the auxiliary "would" (the past of the auxiliary "will") which is used for the future. So that, though the forms for the Future and what we might call the Frequentative Past are not the same in English (as they are in Hebrew), yet they are very closely connected. Thus we

claim that English Syntax is sensitive to and capable of fully expressing the Hebrew kinds of time Perfect and Imperfect; and also that the usages of English forms in different senses closely parallel similar usages of the Hebrew Perfect and Imperfect.

English also affords examples of frequent and rapid change of tense parallel to the changes from Perfect to Imperfect in Hebrew poetry. In English poetry the Historical Present and the Narrative Past alternate pretty frequently with one another.

TENSES OF JOSHUA XV.—XIX.

In reading these chapters we are struck by the frequent occurrence of series of Perfects with Waw, where we should have expected either simple Perfects or Imperfects with Waw.

These series occur in the descriptions of the boundaries of the several tribes. The most complete are those in ch. xv. and ch. xviii. 11, and which give the boundaries of Judah and Benjamin. The series in xvi. 1—xvii. 10 giving the boundaries of the sons of Joseph is more broken, and the account seems to have been curtailed. The accounts of the territories of Simeon and Dan are quite different in form, and consist almost entirely of lists of cities. In the cases of Zebulun, Issachar and Asher and Naphtali such tenses as occur are almost entirely Perfects with Waw, but the accounts consist chiefly of bare lists of names, and it is noticeable that in these four accounts two verbs, **שב** and **פגע**, are used freely, though in all the other accounts only **פגע** is found, and that only once in the case of the sons of Joseph.

This account of the division of the land is interrupted by historical episodes in which the usual narrative tenses, the simple Perfect and the Imperfect with Waw Cons., are used. Moreover, at the head of each account stands a verse or more in which narrative tenses occur, and some of the accounts conclude with a note as to the survival of the Canaanites, and here, too, narrative tenses are used. Sometimes a narrative tense, or tenses, will be found in close connection with these series of Perfects with Waw; here and there a simple Imperfect is found.

These series are chiefly made up of the verbs **עלה, ירד, יצא, הלך, היה, ישוב, פגע, סבב, עבר**, variously repeated and combined; and an account often closes with the formula **והיו תצאותי**.¹

The reader feels at once that, as Driver says: "In the teeth of the constant usage in the preceding portion of the book, it is highly improbable that the Perfect and Waw should be a mere alternative for **וַיֵּן**." However, in xv. 4 the clause **זה יהיה לכם גבול נגב** suggests that these series do not properly

¹ The tenses in these chapters are dealt with by Driver at some length on pp. 172, 173; and the references to Driver in this note are to one or other of these pages.

belong to a narrative, but to an address or discourse; that all these tenses, difficult as they are in straightforward narrative, would be quite in place in the text of a decree or law settling the boundaries.

But Driver deprives us of any light or guidance which we might derive from לָכֵן, by setting it down as an undoubted error, arising from a copyist imagining the verb to express a command. He states that the context is entirely out of harmony with such a sense, points out that elsewhere the pronouns are all in the third person and appeals to the LXX. which reads αὐτῶν. The last consideration is not, perhaps, very weighty when we remember that the LXX. is not without a tendency to avoid difficulties by simplifying the text. As to the context, if the whole be narrative and the tenses frequentative, it might be very difficult to take this particular clause or passage as a command; but we shall venture to suggest a theory which would remove or account for this difficulty and possibly also for the solitary second person. It may be noticed as to this second person that there are very few personal pronouns in the clauses in which the Perfects with Waw occur.

One reason on which Driver specially dwells in maintaining that these tenses are frequentative is the occasional occurrence among them of Imperfects; it is obvious that these Imperfects would be perfectly in place if the tenses belonged to a command.

In opposition to this view of Driver we are inclined to follow the suggestion of the לָכֵן (or לָהֶם, if לָכֵן be a false reading of the copyist, who altered לָהֶם into לָכֵן), and to take these tenses as belonging to a command.

We may suppose that the author of the Book of Joshua had before him official documents containing the decrees fixing the boundaries of the tribes, that these decrees naturally ran in Perfects with Waw and Imperfects, "The boundary shall be, etc." The author selected such portions of these documents as were suitable for his purpose, and inserted them in his book, preserving them, possibly out of special reverence and desire for accuracy, in their original form. He found it convenient to append headings and notes, in which, as part of his own narrative, he used narrative tenses; and he may have used some device, such as spacing, where moderns would use inverted commas, to indicate that he was quoting the precise words of his authority. Origen's system of obelisks is a proof that marks within the text are not an exclusively modern idea. It is possible also that to the writer of the Book of Joshua it may have seemed so obvious that these tenses must belong to an address rather than to a narrative, that he may not have thought it necessary to guard against mistake by any mechanical device. That such mechanical device, if used, should be lost sight of and omitted is rendered extremely probable by the history of the text of the Septuagint in its relation to Origen's Hexapla, the double renderings of a single passage being due to the omission of marks which showed such renderings to be alternative.

We allege in support of this theory—

(1) It accounts simply and easily for the tenses in these sections, and explains why, for a few clauses at the beginning and end, and sometimes for what may be an explanatory note in the middle of an account of a tribe's boundaries, we should find narrative tenses, and elsewhere Imperfects and Perfects with Waw. Driver does not explain why, without any change of subject-matter, we change from initial narrative tenses to frequentative ones. Why should the writer always begin to describe a border with narrative tenses and drop off into frequentatives?

(2) This theory also offers us an explanation of the solitary second personal pronoun **לכם**. In the first place, if we separate xv. 1, 2 and the last sentence of xv. 12 on the ground of the occurrence in them of narrative tenses, and confine ourselves to the verses containing the series of Perfects with Waw and Imperfects, this is the only personal pronoun referring to the children of Judah which occurs in the section.

It is thus possible that the document in this particular case may have been derived from some official archives of the tribe of Judah; wherein, as specially intended for the tribe of Judah, the children of Judah might be addressed in the second person.

(3) Many of those sections of the Pentateuch which are devoted to legislation, use the Perfect with Waw almost exclusively, and the second person does not occur in them. Yet these are commands addressed to the people or to Moses as their representative, e. g., Lev. XIII. Hence the style of these sections is the same as that of sections which are undoubtedly devoted to legislation.

(4) The theory that the writer used documents written in a different person to that of his main narrative, may perhaps be slightly supported by the K^thibh reading **ער עברנו** (Q^ri **ער עברם**) of Josh. v. 1. It is just possible that the writer intended to alter the persons of a narrative in the first person to suit a narrative in the third person, and by oversight left this particular case unaltered.

This supposition does not commit us to the view that the original document was written by a contemporary of the events described. The "us" (**נַו**) may be used of the nation, as an Englishman might say to-day "We conquered at Waterloo."

(5) There are other cases which do not seem to yield very readily to the ordinary Syntax of the tenses; and in these cases also we can explain the presence of Perfects with Waw, and Imperfects, by assuming the introduction into the narrative of word-for-word quotations from documents possibly well known.

For instance, in Neh. III. 14, 15 there occur some rather difficult tenses, and Driver recommends his readers to examine these for themselves, but does not offer them any help. These verses occur in the account of the building of

the wall. Both the verses begin with simple Perfects and contain a clause with simple Imperfects, in one case two, and in the other, three; the clause with the three Imperfects only differs from the others by the insertion of another word.

Is it possible that here also we have quotations from some document which gave the directions for building as a command, that in the other verses the quotations have been modified, but here for some reason left unaltered?

The theory is now very widely current that many books were composed by a recension and combination of parts of previously existing works. If this is true, it is scarcely possible but that some such accidents as the one assumed above should happen.

The presence of simple Perfects here and there in close connection with Perfects with Waw, e. g., in XIX. 34, may readily be accounted for—

(1) By the close connection with the main series of tenses of what was originally separated as an explanatory note or addition.

(2) By the tendency of copyists to assimilate the tenses to what might seem to them the more natural narrative tenses.

(3) By other errors of copyists.

Thus in XIX. 34 **פגע בזכרון מנגב ובאשר פגע מים**, the second **פגע** may be an accidental repetition of the first, the **פגע** and the **באשר** may have been transposed at a time when **ופגע** and **פגע...** were used interchangeably, or the original document may have omitted to state the fact as to the border westwards, and the author of the Book of Joshua may have added it.